THE AUDITION

I. First Hearing

Doug Martin was on the verge of tears. Here he was in beautiful downtown Wilmington, Delaware one week away from auditioning for principal trombone of the highest paying orchestra for which he had ever auditioned, the Wilmington Philharmonic Orchestra. Okay, so the WPO is a per-service, regional orchestra with not much of a reputation outside of the Philadelphia region. But that didn't bother Doug, though. We're talking about a five-figure salary here, one that could be combined with teaching and other gigs in the area, among other things. After the WPO hires him on May 9, 1998, in two years he will get tenure and maybe pitch his tent here. Or maybe this will be a stepping stone to a higher paying orchestra gig, one that paid so well that teaching would not be necessary. Who knows? In the words of Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy, "Tall Oaks From Little Acorns Grow."

It was Saturday night and the orchestra was about a half hour away from tackling Mozart's Twentieth Piano Concerto (no trombones in that work) and, most importantly, Mahler's Fifth Symphony (lots of boneheads in this one!). Although Doug was a big Mahler fan, he never played Mahler before. It was just the luck of the draw; at the conservatory and at summer camp, Doug was always in the other orchestra – the one that wasn't good enough to play Mahler – or just wasn't in an orchestra altogether. Either way, he had to watch other people play the composer he loved most of all. Not anymore, though. A week from tonight, he'll be the guy playing Gloomy Gus Mahler the way he was meant to be played. The first trombone part, at any rate.

Doug had had a nice dinner at a crab house about an hour ago. At 7:30 PM, the Wilmington Concert Hall opened its doors and Doug went to the box office and bought a ticket. Of course, he chose the balcony. The sound is usually better up there and the tickets are cheaper. More to the point, the balcony offers the best view of the brass section.

Doug had never heard the WPO before. As far as he knew, they had never made a recording. And even if they did, recordings do not always do orchestras justice as far as capturing their respective sounds. In addition, retakes often hide a multitude of sins. It is better to hear an orchestra live before auditioning for it. So here Doug was in Wilmington to hear what the WPO sounds like, his future section-mates in particular.

Doug was one of the first people to enter the hall. It was not big, which was good because it couldn't take too much to fill this hall with your sound. Clearly, it had been around for many years. It looked old, with ornate chandeliers, paintings, and murals on the walls. Since the Mozart came first on the program, it would be some time before he heard the low brass. Usually, Mozart concertos put Doug to sleep. Not tonight, though. Wilmington's future principal trombonist was pumped and still more than a little choked up. As his future colleagues slowly filed onstage, Doug took in the whole atmosphere. This is my orchestra, he thought. This is my hall. My city.

A half hour later, the hall lights dimmed and, in due course, Maestro David Rosenthal and pianist Malik Brown marched onto the stage to applause. The hall was close to being sold out. Doug did see a few empty seats here and there but felt no cause for concern over the WPO's future. During the twenty-five to thirty minutes that followed, Doug detected some lapses in precision and intonation from the orchestra (he

could care less about the pianist). If anything, this only made him feel more confident. The WPO musicians are human. Surely, the WPO trombonists are, too. We'll see after intermission. The big question remained, how many of the guys auditioning next week will be human, as well.

The concerto concluded to rousing applause from the WPO faithful. Now, here, for Doug in particular, came the main event! The trombones came onstage at last. Rick Taylor on first, Chris Stone on second, Ed Roberts on bass. They played on large-bore Edwards horns, much like Doug's Bach 42B with the adapted Thayer valve. During the fifteen minutes that followed, the men tooted and talked with each other. It was good to see that they got along. Doug wondered why the incumbent principal trombonist was leaving. A higher-paying gig, perhaps? And will the second trombonist be going for his job? My job, Doug hastened to remind himself. My job and nobody else's.

At last, the Mahler. It's no big secret why most brass players love his music. He gives them plenty to do and many reasons to shine. This brass section did not always shine, though. There were clams in the horns and trumpets. However, Doug did admire the trombones, particularly the bass trombonist, Ed Roberts, who played with a beautiful big tone. Wilmington's future lead bonehead hoped that Ed and Chris were easy to get along with. That's the unhappy side of the orchestra life. As a trombonist-friend of Doug's named Willy Bennett once said, "You practice the same solo and excerpts over and over again until you are blue in the face. You spend weeks devoted to almost nothing else. Then you somehow win over thirty to three hundred players only to end up hating the people sitting next to you." Of course, that did not stop Willy from auditioning for

orchestras jobs himself. In fact, both he and Doug competed for second trombonist of the Central New Jersey Philharmonic two years earlier, both of them failing to get the job. But Willy did make a good point. There are stories from all over the orchestral world about section-mates, trombonists and other orchestra members, who never talked to each other.

Doug judged the Mahler good but not definitive. Is anything ever definitive, he asked himself? Probably not. Most people tend to like the recording they own better than any others because that's how they learned the work. But he did agree with Maestro Rosenthal's tempi, among other things. Is he a bad guy or do the musicians love him?

As he left the Wilmington Concert Hall, Doug felt confident that he could play with the WPO. But he hoped he could speak with at least one member of the trombone section. He had questions.

Sure enough, on the sidewalk with him was the fine bass trombonist, Ed Roberts. Still dressed in concert attire, he was a few paces behind Doug and probably headed for his car. The future principal trombone got up the courage to talk to his future bass trombone.

"Good concert, sir," said Doug.

"Thanks a lot," replied Ed. "I guess that means you could hear us."

"I had no problem hearing you. I like your sound in particular. And I am not saying that just because I am auditioning next week."

"You're going for the principal trombone job, eh?"

"I am."

“Well, good luck to you.”

“Thanks. I hope to play with you for many years to come.”

“Good.”

“If you don’t mind me asking,” said Doug a little nervously, “Is Chris auditioning as well?”

“He is not,” answered Ed. “The guy you heard tonight is actually a substitute who plays in Philly. Chris took the night off. Neither guy is interested in the job.”

This sounds good, thought Doug.

“And what is Rick Taylor doing after this season?”

“Rick is headed to the Atlanta Orchestra. He’ll be playing lead down there starting this Fall.”

Atlanta’s a good gig, thought Doug. You can live off that orchestra’s salary.

“How long has he been in the Wilmington Philharmonic?” asked Doug.

“Eleven years,” replied Ed.

This proves that it is never too late to win a better paying gig, opined Doug, who then wondered why Ed wasn’t in a more prestigious orchestra. He was the star of the show, as far as Doug was concerned, even more than Rick. Ed wasn’t young, so he probably wasn’t going anywhere soon, Doug figured.

“Well,” said Doug, “I hope he does well in Atlanta. And I hope to do well here.”

“Give it your best shot,” Said Ed.

“Thanks, and once again, you played a great concert.”

“Thank you. See you around.”

"Take care."

Ed seemed like a decent guy. Doug figured he can get along with him. His only question was whether he could match Ed's big tone. He thought about it, then told himself, of course he could get match Ed's tone. Remember, this job is his. And when he takes over, it will be Ed's job to blend with him, not the other way around.

With the joyful strains of the last movement of Mahler's Fifth playing over and over in his head, Doug got into his car and headed for his home, located several hours north of Wilmington in East Windsor Township, New Jersey. It was late, but Doug was young and in shape. He was also too excited about his future job and life in Wilmington to fall asleep at the wheel. It will be great, he thought, to have a professional musical identity at last. And even though the job pays little, there will be other supplemental gigs. He looked forward to telling people that he is the principal trombone of the Wilmington Philharmonic Orchestra.

II. Preparations

Twenty-eight years old, Doug worked for a travel agency during the day, played in several semi-professional ensembles, and lived at his parents' home. It was all right for now, although Doug definitely looked forward to his new life in Delaware. Would he be able to afford a house? A house would be nice because he would not have people complaining about his practicing, as he might in either a condo or a co-op. Again, there will be other gigs to supplement the $12,000 or so that he will earn from the orchestra during

his first several seasons on the job. For now, he could practice just about anytime he wanted and did not need to use a practice mute. His supportive parents never complained.

Five days away from the big day, Doug was energized enough to take on the task before him. On Monday, as he would during the next four days, he came home from eight hours of ringing phones and mostly friendly callers, had a little dinner, then got to his real job – practicing the same solo and excerpts over and over again until he was blue in the face. John Stockton, second trombone of the New York Philharmonia and his teacher at the New York School of Music where Doug earned his Master's degree three years back, suggested a simple week-long pre-audition practice regimen for the final week. Two hours on Monday. Two and one half on Tuesday. Three on Wednesday. Four on Thursday. Then, on Friday, the day before the big day, one half hour of basic warm-ups and etudes. Do not play the audition repertoire on Friday. All of that was fine with Doug. He would follow the regimen exactly as recommended.

Actually, Doug had done more than his share of practicing prior to that week and had reached the point where he was capable of playing almost everything from memory, including the solo requested by the WPO, the first movement of the Henri Tomasi Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra. He was thrilled that the Tomasi was chosen. It was, he felt, within his ability. Most orchestras ask for Paul Creston's Fantasy for Trombone and Orchestra, which may be the hardest solo in the repertoire. Doug never really got that one to his satisfaction and had lost several auditions for other orchestras because he wasn't able to pull it off. The choice of the Tomasi suited him. It was one of the reasons why he knew this audition would go differently than the previous ones.

The Tomasi has a lot of high notes and the high register was not Doug's strong suit, although he thought that by the end of the week, it would be. Surely, he told himself, all of his practicing would result in chops of steel. Even so, Doug paced himself on Monday, working on the Tomasi and several excerpts that do not test the high register too much. They were the Rossini William Tell Overture, the Hindemith Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber, and the Berlioz Hungarian March. The last of these was a favorite of Doug's. He had started out his life as a musician a baritone horn player. At an Area All-State concert in which he played in the band, the orchestra performed the Berlioz. Seeing those three boneheads go to town with that exciting trombone section passage towards the end of the piece really blew Doug's mind. He wanted to be one of them. Knowing that orchestral music rarely called for the baritone, he decided to change his emphasis to trombone. The next year, he sat where those three studs had sat the previous year. Tall Oaks From Little Acorns Grow.

Doug strained a bit in his high register with the Tomasi, missing a couple of notes, but he was unfazed. As for the excerpts he chose to work on tonight, the hard part about all of them, which consist of fast passages, is to maintain a consistent tempo, to make sure the notes are even, and to not slow down. After about forty minutes with the Tomasi and a ten minute break, Doug went through the excerpts over and over again. He did not know whether he kept the notes even. But, then again, he asked himself, is there such a thing as perfection? Frank Boyd, second trombone of the Pittsburgh Orchestra and his teacher at the Keystone State Music Festival, didn't think so. After Doug was asked by Frank what he was thinking when he had played the Mahler Third trombone solo, and

Doug responded by saying that he was trying to make everything perfect, his teacher's response was interesting. Frank took Doug to the window, pointed to a tree, and asked him, "Is that tree perfect? Is anything in life perfect?" Doug had to say no, of course.

Then Doug reflected on his conservatory teacher, a man he idolized. His first official lesson as a student of John Stockton began a bit differently. Doug did not remember what he played but he remembered his teacher's evaluation. John told Doug that music is built up of solid blocks of sound, each note of equal length, consistent tone, and perfect intonation. The winner of the audition in this day and age was not the most distinct or even the most musical, but rather the most consistent. In other words, thought Doug then and now, to win an audition, one must be a machine, a robot. Doug doubted at the time that he would ever be a machine and even today he still wasn't sure. He hoped that machines would not dominate the big day. Are you telling me, Doug asked himself rhetorically, that everybody who auditions for an orchestra is unconscious? And wouldn't those players be few and far between and, therefore, be already playing in a major orchestra? Besides, Doug heard the WPO and did not think they were all superhuman. Doug convinced himself that he would be okay and that by Friday, he will be in shape like never before. And, who knows? Maybe Frank Boyd was right and John Stockton was wrong. Who's to say? Both of them play in 52-week orchestras and earn six-figure salaries.

It was a good thing that Doug was young. Between his day-job and the hours of practice, he had little sleep. As for his parents, how they were able to sleep through his honking he did not know either. He surmised that practicing in the basement of his fami-

ly's two-story house lessened the volume enough, although he still must have been a little annoying to them. They never complained, God love them.

Whatever the case, Doug stuck with the regimen, playing Tomasi, Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries, Ravel's Boléro and all the others, eventually putting in four hours on Thursday. At times, he was reminded of his inabilities to remove dents from metal objects in junior high shop class. No sooner did the dent get smoothed over than another dent appeared elsewhere. As he went through the excepts, he felt that after fixing one imperfection another would come up. Again, is anything ever perfect? Doug allowed himself to hope not.

Friday, Doug took a day off from work and went through his concluding half hour. He was physically tired. He embouchure stung a little even when he wasn't playing. Perhaps he would feel better tomorrow, he thought. If he did, maybe that's why his teacher advised him to take it easy the day before the big day. After his half hour workout, Doug packed a small suitcase, ate his lunch, said goodbye to his parents, and headed down I-295 to beautiful Wilmington, Delaware. He arrived in two hours. The traffic was fine. It was not rush hour yet.

Wilmington Grand Hotel was located right across the street from the Wilmington Concert Hall. The hotel had a garage which, like the hotel itself, wasn't cheap. But Doug preferred to walk to his audition rather than drive to it. You have to make things less complicated than they have to be, he told himself. And that this hotel was located across the street from his future workplace made him feel that, again, things will be different this time.

The young lady at the desk saw Doug's instrument case and said to him, "I've seen a lot of musicians come in over the past few years. Let me guess – there is an audition tomorrow?"

"Good guess," said Doug cheerfully. "I take it many musicians stay at this hotel when they audition for the Wilmington Philharmonic."

"Indeed, they do. Is the audition tomorrow?"

"It is."

"Well, good luck!"

"Thank you very much." As Doug went to the hotel room, he chuckled to himself. That woman probably wishes good luck to every musician who checks in.

Upon finding his room and putting everything in its place. Doug planned his first evening in his city. He thought about getting into his car and heading somewhere in search of a cheesesteak. Nah, he said to himself. Keep everything simple. Room service will do. Room service and a Phillies game. The audition was at 10:00 in the morning so, unless the game goes into extra innings, he will probably be able to see the whole thing.

Doug devoured his okay meal at 5:30. A decent steak with a potato. He remembered Jim Stevens, the former co-principal trumpeter of the Chicago Philharmonic, recommending that exact menu before a concert. Whatever. Then he turned on the game.

He tried to watch, but his mind was on the big day and all of the other big days that will follow in Wilmington. Was he over-confident? Maybe, but John Stockton told him to be confident. It was the only way to be in situations like this. It was the only way to be in life in general. And so he let his imagination run wild. Concerts and sectionals

with Ed Roberts and Chris Stone. Mahler symphonies. Students. Lots and lots of students. Gigs. Philly isn't too far away. Maybe he will sit in with the Philadelphia Symphony from time to time. Maybe a job will open up in the Philadelphia Symphony at some point after he takes over in Wilmington. That job will be his, just like the Wilmington job. You have to be confident in your ability. Again, just as John Stockton told you, it's the only way. Whoa! A home run by Rico Brogna.

Somehow, Doug went to sleep soon after the game. He was wise not to have had anything with caffeine in it at dinnertime.

III. The Big Day

Doug woke up at 8:00 AM as pumped as he had been the previous evening. Although he had asked for one, he did not really need for the desk to send a wakeup call. He already woke up every day at 8:00 and, even so, getting out of bed was never a problem for him. And, of course, he was psyched. He immediately took care of his personal hygiene and got dressed.

He thought about practicing a little but decided that it wasn't necessary. There will be plenty of time to warm up at the hall and, really, at this point, that's all a brass player needs to do on a day like this. Besides, you certainly do not want to play too much before a concert or an audition. There are only so many bullets in the gun. And, of course, some hotel guests might not be thrilled, especially in the morning.

Just then, he heard a bonehead practicing in the room across from his. "Okay, big guy," Doug thought about his competitor. "If you think this is a good idea, go for it. I will

pass." In truth, this guy practicing in his room was one more reason why Doug thought today would be different. Not only might he tire himself out, but he wasn't really that good, at least in Doug's opinion. He certainly wasn't a John Stockton machine. Doug could hear flaws in his intonation, among other things.

Doug thought back to an NFL Films movie he once saw in which Buffalo Bills head coach Marv Levy says to another coach before a game, while players from both teams were on the field getting ready, that the opposing players always look bigger and stronger than yours. Doug felt something similar whenever he auditioned for symphony orchestras. You always think that everyone in the room is a better player than you. That is never true. And then he thought of the guy (gal?) across the hall. He can beat him or her. Heck, he can beat anybody. Again, today is different. He can feel it in his gut.

At 8:45, Doug left his hotel room carrying his trombone case with his instrument in it. He went to the hotel restaurant and had a light breakfast. You don't eat too much before you play either a concert or a rehearsal, and you certainly don't gorge before an audition. He did not see any trombonists in the restaurant and, really, did not want to. He will see plenty of them across the street soon enough. The only time he talked to another bonehead while waiting to audition was in Poughkeepsie, where he was reunited with David Miller, a guy two years older than he who had attended Hightstown High School with him. He hadn't seen him in years. He was pleasant with Doug. He was also one of two players who made the finals, eventually losing to the other guy. The other guy wasn't Doug, unfortunately.

Having finished his toasted corn muffin and cup of coffee, Doug concluded that he was ready to begin his new career. He left the restaurant and hotel and went across the street to the Concert Hall. One more reason why this day was different? It was a perfect Spring day. At least Doug did not get rained on while crossing the street. And it wasn't chilly outside, either.

Once in the hall, Doug met a member of the orchestra who was there to tell all of the boneheads where to go. He directed Doug to a room behind the stage. Doug went through the orchestra seats leisurely, again looking around his future workplace. He thought about clapping his hands to test the acoustics. Nah. He was no expert on acoustics. Besides, he did not know where in this building the audition was going to take place. Sometimes it's on the stage, sometimes it is in another room. Either way, Doug was ready to rock and roll.

In the room was a bonehead with glasses who was reading a book with an expressionless look on his face. Doug wondered why. This isn't just any other day. Well, maybe that's the way he should be, too. The job is already mine, Doug thought. It isn't this guy's job or anybody else's. Still, it might have been a good idea to bring a book. It would take his mind off the solo and excerpts a little bit.

Doug and the bookworm made eye contact and both said hi to each other, then the other guy went back to his book. Doug took a seat not far away and debated whether to start warming up. Maybe not. It's still a little early and, again, there are only so many bullets in the gun. So Doug gave in to continuing to hear the Tomasi Concerto in his head, which he had been doing all morning anyway. It's a good piece, at least by the standards

of most trombone concertos, almost none of them of interest to anyone other than trombonists. Doug was never a big fan of solo literature for trombones. For him, brass players belonged in the back of the orchestra, not in front.

Just then, a tall, athletic young man came in carrying his case. Doug nodded in his direction but was ignored. The big guy went right to the bookworm who had already looked up from his book.

"Mark," said the bookworm, "Good to see you."

"Nice to see you again, Steve. It's been a while since we were in the same room."

"What have you been up to? You still in the American Youth Orchestra?"

"Two more weeks to go."

"I haven't heard the AYO before. How is it?"

"Best orchestra I have ever played with. Even better than the Philly Institute Orchestra."

The Philadelphia Institute of Music, thought Doug. That's one of the hardest music schools to get into. Still, my school was pretty competitive, too.

"Seriously?" asked Steve. "Our orchestra was good."

You mean to tell me, asked Doug to himself, that both guys went to PIM? Wow.

"This one's the real deal," replied Mark. "We've had a great concert every week. No duds. We're talking everybody playing perfectly together and in tune with no wrong notes and perfect balance, no matter what the piece. There were concerts like that in our school, but not every week like this one."

A John Stockton clone, thought Doug. What about music? What about an orchestra playing with passion and expression. Are all orchestras made up of robots?

"And where have you been, Steve?"

"I played first trombone in the Baltimore Opera Orchestra this past season."

"And how's that group?" asked Mark."

"It sucks. It's a community orchestra, just like this one. But a gig's a gig."

"Agreed, agreed."

How many trombonists, wondered Doug, did Steve beat out in order to play in his "community orchestra?" He'd give his right arm to play with the Baltimore Opera Orchestra, or the WPO, or any group that pays. Heck, he plays in community orchestras. Okay, so they're not the American Youth Orchestra or a Big Five group, but they make music. Those guys made him sick. He'd love to win an audition, to be paid to play and to get tenure and all that good stuff. Steve and Mark totally took it for granted.

The two of them went on, discussing the big names they studied and performed with, monster players all of them. It was then that Doug realized that he was losing his focus. Remember, he told himself, this job's MINE! For all you know, Mark and Steve are talking a bigger game than they play. True, they have won auditions and played in top-notch training orchestras. Well, what was he? Chopped liver? He played in some good groups, too. He had credentials. He studied with some big names.

No, this was not making him feel good, listening to these two hot shots, he thought. It was still a little too early to warm up. So Doug left the room and went outside for some fresh air. He paced the sidewalks a bit, trying to regain his confidence. Remem-

ber that trombonist in the hotel room across from yours? You can play, Doug told himself. Just relax.

He then saw a few trombonists walking towards him, each carrying their distinctive cases and gig bags. It's a myth, he thought, thinking that all players are better than you. Doug told himself that none of these guys were. This job was his.

At 9:30, Doug returned to the room, put his horn together, and began to warm up. His waiting until now was a good idea, he said to himself. Everyone else is warming up, so no one can hear him play and say something derogatory about his playing. Doug went through his warm-ups trying to ignore everyone else. It was hard, though. Mark and Steve were able to play similar exercises a lot faster than Doug could.

Knock it off! Get yourself ready, damn it!

Doug felt pretty good. No aches, no strain in the tone. The sound was dark and round, the way it should be. If he can't play as fast and everything like the PIM guys, so what? What matters is the music on the stand. Everyone plays Ravel's Boléro at the same speed, for the most part.

At 10:00, a WPO member came into the room and had everyone sign in. Doug made sure that he wasn't the first trombonist to do so. He had been told that the first musician to audition rarely wins. Why? He did not know. But he didn't argue. Twenty-eight trombonists were auditioning. Only one would win.

The procedure was similar to previous auditions Doug took. Each player was given a number and a sheet with the numbers on it was given to the committee who sat behind a curtain. This ensures that the committee could not see who was playing and be bi-

ased one way or another. The committee chooses the best player with a number, not a name, to identify him or her. And you are not allowed to talk before or after you play. The committee must not know who you are.

Doug reflected on this a bit. The criticism some people have about auditions is that the best person often doesn't win. Maybe it's because John Stockton was right: accuracy trumps musicality. Doug had heard over the years that in the pre-union days, conductors unilaterally chose musicians. There were no behind-the-curtain auditions like there are today. Does this newer way of doing things make orchestras better? Probably, Doug told himself. There may have been past times when conductors hired players who either blackmailed them or just weren't good at all. Maybe nothing's fair, he thought.

Doug also knew that orchestra jobs were easier to get in years past. With dance bands and other gigs being prized by musicians, there were not as many brass players auditioning for symphony orchestras. Now that the orchestra is practically the only gig in town, the job is harder to get. Hence, orchestras hire only the best. Then again, Doug had heard many recordings from decades ago that he really liked, so the old-time musicians could not have been too bad. But, of course, retakes hide a multitude of sins.

Doug was fifth in order, which seemed safe. Fully warmed up, he sat and awaited his destiny. Other trombonists chatted among each other but he did not join in. Mark and Steve gossiped and acted like brass jocks. Doug saw four players come and go and could not read on their faces whether or not they were happy with how things went. He told himself to be the same way, even if he plays well. Which he will.

At last, the moment was at hand. Doug was directed to another door in the room and led onstage. The committee was behind a curtain up in the balcony. The music was on the stand. Doug tried not to be nervous. All right, so he was nervous! Maybe some of that nervousness will translate into his sound in a good way. Still, he's done this before. By now he should be used to this. It bothered him a little that he wasn't.

"The Tomasi!" commanded a voice from behind the curtain. It did not sound like Ed Roberts's voice.

Doug took a deep breath and played the opening. The piece begins with a chord in the orchestra followed by a short cadenza for the solo trombone. Doug heard the orchestra chord in his head then let it fly. He slightly clipped the high A-flat to which the opening run rises. He had to keep going, though. Maybe the committee didn't hear it as loudly as he did, he thought. After the run, the trombone rests for a few measures. Doug counted every one of them. You have to. If you don't, it will count against you.

After the rests, Doug attempted the second cadenza, which includes a high D-flat. He missed it, damn it, but was able to navigate the rest of it, only his mind was more on the D-flat than on the passage he was playing. He then began to count the rests that followed the second cadenza, while preparing himself for the waltz-like passage…

"Thank you! Wagner."

The Ride of the Valkyries. Everyone knows how that one goes, even many people who don't even listen to classical music, much less play it. And there are no high notes in this excerpt. The main thing is to not slow down and make the syncopated triplets even. He may not be the robot that Mark and Steve are, thought Doug. But he could do this.

Heck, they still want to hear him play, so he could not have muffed up the Tomasi too much.

Doug began the Ride. “Gotta keep even,” he told himself as he played. “Don’t forget to be in tune. You’re not in tune! Get in tune! Are you even? No, you’re not – STAY EVEN! Stop thinking too much while you’re playing. Just make music! That’s what it is all about…”

“Thank you!”

Doug remembered not to say anything as he left the stage. He did not know if this was a total crash-and-burn, but he did not do well and he knew it. He felt nauseous. Maybe he did better than he thought.

No, he didn’t.

The best thing about a bad audition is that you don’t have to play again unless either you advance to the next round or, barring that, you simply feel like it. If he did not advance, thought Doug, it will be days, maybe even weeks, before he picks up the horn again. Assuming he didn’t advance, not winning in Wilmington will bother him more than did any of the past auditions. This job paid more than the others and, more importantly, he came to Wilmington more experienced with auditions. He thought he was ready to win an audition.

Doug sat in the same chair he sat in while listening to the two hot shots pontificate on the trials of performing in community orchestras and the joys of playing in groups that play together and in tune. He tried not to look upset and did not know if he succeeded. He watched the remaining boneheads come and go and could not read on their faces how

they did. He asked himself, am I the only one who looked unhappy? Or do I not look unhappy at all?

There was little he could do but wait for the seemingly inevitable. He sat in his chair and watched as the remaining trombonists went in and out of the room.

Big surprise, he did not advance. Not long after the last trombonist auditioned, a WPO musician came into the room and announced that only two guys did. It was no shock to Doug who they were. Doug wanted to leave the hall but his curiosity got the better of him. Most of the others stayed to find out who became Wilmington's new principal trombone, and he did, too. In the end, it was Mark who prevailed. He acted like it was no big deal. Nor did Steve, who presumably was on his way back to Crab-town. Doug went up to Mark and congratulated him. Mark said thanks without really looking at him. As Doug left Wilmington Concert Hall, probably for the last time, he hoped that the two of them enjoyed playing in their community orchestras.

Doug had planned on staying in Wilmington that night, fully expecting to be crowned king. He would then go home on Sunday. Since he lost the audition, Doug handled things a little differently. He called home and told his family the bad news. They told him not to be down, that he'll win the next time, yada, yada, yada. It being 1:30, Doug tried to figure out what to do with the rest of the day. He was too upset to eat, so lunch was out of the question. So he went to the hotel garage, got his car, and started driving.

Everybody has their strengths and weaknesses, as well as a few idiosyncrasies. Doug enjoyed reading maps and was blessed with a good sense of direction. So he drove and he drove with no destination in mind and no music playing in the car.

The Pennsylvania countryside is beautiful. Lots of farm country with many patches of color. Why Doug associated this area of the world with Mahler is difficult to say. He did remember his dad playing a tape of Bernard van der Meulen and the Netherlands Orchestra performing Mahler's Fifth in the car when they were in this part of the world back when he was a kid. He wondered if he would ever get to play Mahler.

Soon he was well into Amish country. In fact, he was really in it. He was where the tourists don't go. Doug was on a dirt road. He came across a horse and buggy driven by a man in full Amish gear, beard and everything. He thought about unrolling the window and saying to the man, "Hi! I screwed up today! How about you?" He didn't, but thinking of doing it cheered him up a little.

After several hours of driving aimlessly, Doug decided to head back to his Wilmington hotel. Gas ain't cheap, so he did not drive to Ohio like he briefly fantasized about doing. He crossed the Susquehanna River, turned left, and followed the river south, eventually reaching I-95. He never gets lost, he thought to himself. Now there's something he was talented at.

Once ensconced in his hotel room, he let his imagination fly again. Will there be other auditions? He wasn't sure. It's pretty clear that everywhere he goes to win a job, he will compete with Marks and Steves, to say nothing of John Stocktons. Those guys are probably right – you have to be a robot these days to have a chance at winning an orches-

tra job. Doug thought about his childhood heroes and remembered their sounds, all distinct and full of personality. Is it really true that players like those do not exist anymore? Of course, the WPO is human, as he heard for himself one week ago. Too many aging members not playing like they used to play? Then Doug remembered the young WPO brass players who missed notes. Is the secret to winning not letting anything phase you whenever you audition?

Doug was at a crossroads. His dream of winning an orchestra gig will probably never happen. He just wasn't likely to play like you clearly have to play to be competitive. And even if he was, only one person can win. Since his high register wasn't his strong suit, maybe his mistake was going for principal trombone. Perhaps he should stick to second trombone auditions. Unfortunately, he muffed the Wagner Ride, too. No real high notes in that excerpt.

What next? Is he really going to be in customer service for the rest of his life? Doug didn't hate his job. But he felt that there needed to be more to his life than answering phone calls. Was it time to read the want ads? But what was he prepared to do besides play the trombone? Maybe he can go back to school and earn a DMA in performance, then get a college teaching gig. Not a wonderful idea either. There are probably a lot of players going for academic jobs, too, many of them better players than him. Doug never desired to be a public school music teacher, not after seeing several band directors burn out towards the end of their careers.

This wasn't good, thought Doug. He was too down right now. He lost an audition. Big deal. This wasn't the first time. But after all it took to get to Wilmington – the studying, the preparing, the passion – he was tired. And he was too young to be tired.